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THE MEANING OF THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT.

THE term "Social Movement" is already a cant phrase both in Europe and America. It once had dignity. It is so common now that it is falling into contempt. The social movement was that dawning of national consciousness which produced the series of revolts from hierarchic sway called the Reformation. The social movement was the growth of the third estate from a name to a power. The social movement was the abolition of political privilege, the enlargement of religious toleration, the extension of industrial opportunity.

The social movement is, an unfriendly observer might say, a confusion of fussy, fidgety folk, blocking each other and everybody else by their foolishness. Here it is free soup, and there it is demand for a work-test instead of free soup. It is industrial education here, it is there a trade-union practice to prevent people from learning trades. It is importunity for more law, and it is clamor for no law. It is in one group the prescription of political machinery, and in another the proscription of political machinery. It is in one party outcry for more democracy, and in another it is a wail for revival of aristocracy. The social movement on the whole seems at best a tuning of the orchestra. Many are the doubters whether there will be any symphony. Let us not be cynics. Let us try to be fair and appreciative. The "social movement" of our time is not a proper butt for ridicule. It will not be arrested by pointing out its contradictions, any more than the waves of the sea will be stilled by showing that they do not all keep the same *tempo*.

Let us try to represent the social movement candidly. So long as men have lived they have at times showed two opposite dispositions; first, to calmly take life as they found it; second, to try to better themselves. It would be altogether distorted to represent past times as controlled by the former impulse, and

to assert that the latter is peculiar to our day. The migrations of Semites and Mongols and Teutons would disprove that. The history of industry and commerce and war and science would disprove it. The study of every great nation would disprove it. Men have always tried to improve their condition. Nevertheless the modern social movement means that there is a new note in men's purpose to better themselves. It has new force. It has a changed outlook.

Specifications must be understood in a very general sense. They sketch broad outlines of comparison. They would not apply to minute details. When I say that there is a new note in men's purpose to better themselves, I mean this: men used to accept the situation and tried to make themselves as comfortable as possible in it. Today they propose to change the situation. Men used to try to better themselves within the condition in which their lot was cast. They now try to better the condition itself. We may illustrate the earlier temper regarding progress by the attitude of Paul toward certain relations about which the Corinthian Christians wanted advice (1 Cor. 7.) What had the apostle to say about celibacy or marriage; about Christians whose marital partners clung to the old faith; and about slaves? Paul's advice was distinctly against staking all upon attempts to secure improvement by changing the condition, and distinctly in favor of contentment with trying to do better within the conditions. "Wast thou called being a bond servant? Care not for it; but if thou canst become free, use it rather. Brethren, let each man, wherein he was called, therein abide with God." And it was entirely in accord with the policy of betterment within the conditions when John the Baptist, in answer to the question "What shall we do?" advised the people in general, "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none: and he that hath food, let him do likewise." And he advised the publicans, "Extort no more than that which is appointed you;" and again the soldiers, "Do violence to no man, neither exact anything wrongfully, and be content with your wages." (Luke 3:10-14). That is, "adjust yourselves to the proper

requirements of your condition." Not a word about exchanging one condition for another.

Now my point is that this used to be the rule, and variations from it were the exception. Today the tendency is to make these exceptions relatively more numerous than ever before, or to put it strongly, modern men do not stop with bettering themselves within their condition, they want to reform their condition. They are not content with trying to get better wages. They want to overthrow the wage system. They do not stop with plans to provide for a rainy day. They want to abolish the rainy day. They are not content with conjugal fidelity. They want to reconstruct the family. They are not satisfied with improvements in the working of governments. They want to eliminate governments. They look with contempt upon adjustment of relations between social classes. They want to obliterate social classes. The emphasis today is on change of conditions rather than upon adjustment to conditions. Consequently too much of the labor problem is simply the problem of avoiding labor. Instead of feeling a pride and obligation in service, men and women through all the grades are debauched by the vision of escape from service, or what amounts to the same thing, exchange of work for a state that seems to require less work. Not how to do well the work of our present condition, but how to get into a condition which seems to promise release from work, is the question which teases the least respectable, and sometimes the more respectable of those who make the social movement. In the older countries Americans are constantly surprised by evidences of pride in being the latest of several generations in the line of fathers and sons who have succeeded to the same lowly occupation, and still find satisfaction in conducting it well. With us the rule is discontent unless the occupation of the children promotes them to conditions supposed to be more dignified than those of their parents.

In the second place the social movement of our time has a new force or volume. It takes more people to make the people than ever before. Every ranch and farm, every fishing hamlet,

every factory loft, and every crossroads store helps to increase unrest if not to accelerate motion. Aspiration to get on in the world makes slum tenements and frontier cabins headquarters of agitation. The people who were once hewers of wood and drawers of water, and were dumb at their occupation unless they were harried to desperation by some exceptional infliction, are today practiced coiners and utterers of social philosophies. Formerly only a rare few tried to take a bird's-eye view of what was going on in the world. As we say in sociological language, there was a very low degree of social consciousness. The people who felt themselves parts of the great moving world as a whole were hard to find. Now there is a sort of feeling among the obscurest and most helpless people that they have the issues of life in their own hands. They are the source of power. They have but to say the word in sufficiently large numbers and the world will move as they order. The people who used to be called the rabble are now making their own appraisal of their social value. They are not abashed at the thought of steering the ship of state with their own hands. No vague awe draws invisible but impassable lines beyond which they must not step in pursuit of their desires. All sorts and conditions of men are saying with more than the bravado of Macbeth, "What man dare, I dare!" More than this, the increasing volume of social force has new leverages with which to exert its power. In the days of John Ball in England, or of the Bundschuh in Germany, the masses had merely the power of numbers. They had none of the tools of popular education, few means of communication, little political influence, no plausible programmes, no power of organization, no allies to speak of in other classes. Today the same social elements have more knowledge than the average clergyman had in many periods of the Middle Ages. They give a living to crowds of crafty men for printing back at them their own provincial thoughts. They are learning to array themselves in effective political formations. They are producing and spreading programmes which have the merit of aiming at many things which it would be very comfortable to have. They are cultivating mass sympathies and drilling themselves in

mass movements, and, not least of all, they are sapping and mining the foundations of supposed pillars of society by making many friends and champions in social classes whose lives move in entirely different lines. The social movement is thus more than a class movement. It includes among its active promoters people of all social strata, except perhaps the enormously rich, and even these do not always oppose the tendencies that I am describing. The social movement is popular in the most inclusive sense, *i. e.*, it is made up of all sorts of people. Property is universally conservative, but in our day great property holders who on the whole sympathize with the main tendencies of the social movement are by no means rare. The social movement is thus not the inertia of the many slightly disturbed by the few, it is the momentum of the many, hardly restrained by all the arts that the few can contrive.

I said third, that the social movement has a new outlook. It may be defined in a word. The supreme purpose of life has sometimes been to escape the wrath to come. People are today fleeing from the wrath that has come and they are frankly prospecting for happiness. We may argue with this state of things as we please, the fact remains. The social movement is a deliberate undertaking to get more satisfaction out of life than it has ever yielded. It is impelled by bold and stubborn presumption that men are fools not to be happy and comfortable in this world. There is not very much reckoning with the conditions of another world in the present social movement. The idea is that there is a way to be physically and morally happy now if we can find it, and then the hereafter will take care of itself. This way of looking at things is not necessarily opposed to religion. It is opposed to all conceptions of religion which make it a matter of greater importance to dead men than to living ones.

It may be charged that if I have correctly described the social movement it is selfish and sordid and materialistic. That would be true in particular cases. It would not be true in general. I would rather say that the social movement is an effort for concrete, specific, definable goods, without much attention to the

relation which these may bear to remoter abstract goods. The social movement is a demand for shorter working hours ; for more sanitary working space ; for better tenements ; for higher wages ; for less breadwinning by women and children ; for shifting of the burden of taxation so that the load will bear more equally on all backs ; for expenditure of public moneys in ways that will give all classes a rightful share of benefits ; for the use of governmental machinery so that it will help most those who can do least for themselves, and not artificially increase the advantage of those who can do most for themselves. The social movement is in spirit a very sincere attempt of people who are sure they want certain things to secure those things. People are reaching for goods that they understand, or think they do, without bothering their heads much about goods that they do not understand.

All this however is very near the surface of the social movement, and we are after the deeper meaning. Without doubt the vast majority of those who make up the social movement would say that I have already told all there is to it. I should be sorry if I felt obliged to believe them. There are undercurrents that these hints have not sounded. There are reasons for the social movement that have not yet been stated. Quite likely most of the people in the movement would not acknowledge the undercurrent. Very probably they would not accept the statement of reasons that I shall offer. The baby in the cradle cries, for reasons that he does not understand, and would not admit if they were explained to him. The instinct of mother and nurse finds out what kind of pain produces the cry. The social movement is to a considerable extent a spontaneous cry of pain and a spasmodic clutching for pleasure ; the sources of the pain and pleasure are not known by the majority who make the demonstration. They are not altogether beyond analysis and explanation.

My interpretation of the social movement then makes it, with all its faults, a proof that the natural force of humanity is not abated, that social virility is not exhausted. The social movement is today's form of the same vital facts which have always been the impulse of human advancement.

Civilization has been humanity's gradual discovery of itself. From the start men have been the same enigma to themselves that the Yerkes telescope is to the men who are now learning to use it—or rather a thousandfold more enigmatical. The question about human nature, as about the telescope, has been, What is it good for? What is its capacity? What can it do? Ever since human acts have been recorded some men have always gone ahead of others in answering the question by experiment. Human cunning, prowess, foresight, persistence have made some men superior to others; but at the same time they have advertised human resources, and registered human capabilities. Some men have been adventurers, discovering their own opportunities and talents and powers. They have made successful ventures. They have acquired new skill, they have made new tools, they have devised new processes, they have won comfort, riches, renown. Then other men have looked at them, and have said to themselves—“They are only men after all. They are made of the same stuff I am made of. They have no rights or powers that are not in me too. What they have done, what they have gained, and enjoyed, is proper object of endeavor for every man.” Enterprise and envy have been equal partners in making the world. The strong, original, capable men of one day have been the typical, model, standard men of the next day. What these pioneer men have been and done and possessed all men have presently tried to be and do and possess. Humanity has found itself by proxy. Men with the fullest tide of life in their veins have gone ahead in trying their strength and their talent. Then less original men have seen the results. They have wanted them. They have said “These things come from human strength and talent. We are also human. We will have the same things too.”

There has been no more constant motive in civilization than the one which cropped out in Casca's tirade against Cæsar.

I cannot tell what you and other men
Think of this life; but, for my single self,
I had as lief not be, as live to be
In awe of such a thing as I myself.

I was born as free as Cæsar: so were you :
We both have fed as well: and we can both
Endure the winter's cold as well as he.

Ye gods, it doth amaze me,
A man of such a feeble temper should
So get the start of the majestic world,
And bear the palm alone.

Men at some time are masters of their fates :
The fault, dear Brutus is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.
"Brutus" and "Cæsar;" what should be in that "Cæsar"?
Why should that name be sounded more than yours ?
Write them together, yours is as fair a name';
Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well.

Weigh them, it is as heavy ; conjure with 'em,
"Brutus" will start a spirit as soon as "Cæsar,"
Now, in the names of all the gods at once,
Upon what meat does this our Cæsar feed,
That he is grown so great ?

— Jul. Cæ. Act. I. Sc. II.

That is, men have taken the measure of themselves in the person of more strenuous men. Great men have served to show what is latent in little men. Rare men have explored the possibilities of life for mediocre men, and average life has tended to achieve the fullness and diversity of many exceptional lives. Extraordinary men have roused desires dormant in the ordinary man, and thus humanity has progressively found itself. Humanity has expressed itself, and asserted itself, and exerted itself in its most forceful specimens, and in them and their works the rest of men have learned to know their own nature, and power, and destiny.

The social movement of today is the onward march of that same average humanity towards further gains indicated as within human reach, because they have actually been compassed by some men. We are simply continuing the series of movements by which all historical men have proved their power to take up

and use knowledge of themselves and their resources that representative men have gained. Social classes have been advance agents of prosperity for the social mass. Powers and rights that aggressive classes have at first monopolized have gradually appeared to belong not to classes as such, but to men as such.

For example, the very abstract idea of individual rights themselves, as distinguished from the privileges that belong to members of a class, had to be asserted and maintained in the concrete over and over again by a few, before it could be presented to the imagination and then demanded as the proper possession of the many. Humanity was such a dull mass once that the individual was imperceptible within it. Castes separated themselves with their claims, and "rights," and "privileges." Families maintained separateness and dignity. Cities asserted independence of other cities and masters. Other groups got legal recognition — such as church, monastery, university, or gild. Each of these had their "rights," but it was a long evolution before there was a definite notion of an individual, as having rights distinct from his share of the rights of his group.

We have a comparatively plain record of various steps by which this change took place. It appears, for instance, in the shifting of ideas that gradually demolished feudalism. It is common knowledge that under the feudal system only a small percentage of persons had socially recognized rights. These were the lords and their vassals, between whom there was a solemnly ratified compact. The great masses not in the feudally contracting class were without the pale of defined rights. Presently it was so evidently a good thing for the class with rights to have those rights, that many other people began to say to themselves "Rights are good things for those who have them. Being men like those people who have rights, why should we not have some too?" A by-product of this reasoning was a motion of rights as belonging to human beings, not to exceptional classes of human beings.

A similar progress is illustrated in the case of towns that got certain liberties from their masters. The liberties that the towns

enjoyed proved advantageous to the towns. People who lived in the country saw that the towns thrived upon "liberties." They thought within themselves "Townsmen find 'liberties' a good thing. Doubtless countrymen would find them an equally good thing." Then the rustics made struggles for liberties and at last got them. With them came a clearer conception of personal liberty. The same process with similar effects runs through the evolution of the popular idea of law in England. Under the Norman kings legal rights were concessions from the sovereign to the subject in a charter. They are now, ostensibly at least, volitions by the subjects expressing their will about the society which they compose. Again, the process is illustrated in the tedious development of the idea which was at work before the Reformation, but which did not come to maturity till it reformed the Reformation. It was the antithesis of the idea that religion is the prerogative of a privileged class, and that administration of religion belongs to that class. Men began to believe that if religion is good for some it is good for all. They believed that if it is a prerogative of some it is a prerogative of all. They refused to believe that there is any provision in the nature of things for a part of the human race to grow fat on religion, while the rest of the race only grew lean from it. They virtually declared and maintained that so far as religion is a real benefit to anybody, its like benefits belong to everybody. They then either rejected religion as an artificial imposition upon men, or they claimed it as an equal natural right of all men in their freedom of commerce with the universe.

By such steps as these this rudimentary idea of the paramount dignity of persons, regardless of their social state, has become distinct and commonplace. It has been made very specific in a thousand applications. Whenever any men have reached an evident vantage ground, other men have begun to say "Either they hold that advantage as a fair reward for special work, or they have no business to occupy it at all, or, finally, it is the proper place and reward for all men, who are really entitled to the rights of men."

I repeat, then, that the social movement throughout history has been an instinctive effort to get for more men the things that have seemed to be good for some men. The social movement of today is in one view only the latest episode in this incessant effort. In another view there are distinguishing characteristics of the incident, which call for special notice.

First, then, things that were supposed to be assured to all Americans a hundred years ago, today seem to many to be in jeopardy. When our fathers framed the Declaration of Independence they thought it "self-evident" that all men "are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." Among these rights they thought there was no room for question about "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

The case is distinctly different now. Not that the theory has changed, but conditions have changed so that thousands of men distinctly believe and other thousands vaguely suspect that the latest gains in civilization have clouded the title of the average man to life, liberty, and free pursuit of happiness. The social movement of today is in great part a desperate struggle to save what seems to have been lost in the industrial revolution. The toiling millions can buy with their wages more comforts than they ever could before. The laboring class, as a class, is more necessary to civilization than ever. The individual laboring man today, however, is haunted by the thought that he may any day lose his job. He feels that he has less certainty of keeping himself and family from starvation or pauperism than the average American slave had of living in comfort through old age. The free man's freedom today is evidently a struggle with severer and more relentless contingencies than slaves as a class have encountered in civilized countries in modern times. Men are accordingly beginning to feel that the wide wide world is a very crowded place, and that its accommodations are not as free as they used to be. Somehow a great deal of the space has been spoken for in advance by people who hold it in reserve for themselves and their friends. We find ourselves very seriously playing the old game of "goals." There are fewer goals than

there are players. Each change of places gives somebody a chance to improve his condition, but at somebody's peril of losing his position. Opportunities are today so controlled that men feel themselves more subject to the caprice of others than at any time since serfdom disappeared. It is no comfort to the sidetracked man to read in tables of statistics the story of material and moral gains by all classes. These tables make no exhibit of the sense of insecurity among individuals within the classes. If that schedule could be filled out it would show a balance of unhappiness so great that it possibly makes our present civilization bankrupt. Machinery and capital and commercial combinations put multitudes in a condition of dependence on vast operations upon which they can exert but feeble influence. The many are getting into a state of panic as they contemplate the possibilities of this dependent condition. They feel that they have somehow been tricked out of their share of guarantees for "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness." They suspect that they are really being deceived by smooth words. They think they detect the beginnings of a slavery for the many in which the masters are released from the moral responsibility which mitigated the lot of former slaves, and at the same time have subtler means of making their mastery oppressive.

I will not undertake to discuss the grounds of this belief, nor to pass upon its correctness. I state the fact that men by millions take virtually this view of present social conditions, and the social movement is to be understood accordingly. It is really, in one part of its strategy, an abandonment of the old lines in which men a century ago fought for "liberty, equality, fraternity." That fanciful frontier is much too far advanced. The men of today are fighting not primarily for these ideal conquests. They are fighting for *security*: security of standing ground; security of opportunity; security of personal recognition among the shareholders in the inheritances of the ages; security of a man's chance to be a man; security that the mighty impersonal power of capital and organization shall not

be allowed to march masses of men roughshod over individual men, in pursuit of schemes vast in aim, but needlessly terrific in means. The French Republic gravely parades that legend as its ideal. It is maddening the very people whom it is intended to soothe.

I predict that this fact about the social movement will be perceived more and more, and that it will shape more and more the strategy of the movement. Men are parts of society and necessarily subordinate to society. It is too late to avoid that fact. The needs of society must necessarily require frequent exercise of eminent domain over individual interests in ways for which damages cannot be collected. But it is possible that we are at present rating individuals as too small and too cheap parts of society. It is possible that our mighty plans of commercial conquest are not worth success, because it would have to be purchased at too great cost of individual security. The social movement, candidly and fairly interpreted, means that millions of men believe this to be the case. They say we have invented some modern improvements that are working at too great cost of manhood. They pay in false coin. Their profits are delusions. They are destroying the securities on which reliance should be placed for individual and social strength. "Give back by any means the vanishing security which we have exchanged for deceptive and debasing prosperity."

I repeat that I am not attempting to weigh the justice of this plea. It is the temper of the social movement as I observe it, and I am trying to state the bald fact. The fact must be clearly understood, whether we justify it or not. Otherwise we are entirely at fault in our estimate of the social movement. There is certainly a solemnity about this matter when we come to see these features. Men are going back to first principles. They are saying that security of fundamental rights is good for some men, and therefore good for all men. They are saying that this security is being impaired. They are demanding that it shall be strengthened. No temporary and frivolous issue this. There can be no permanent settlement until there are different

popular convictions about social tendencies, or until the tendencies themselves are changed.

But if there is solemnity about the social movement it has also traits of sublimity. If security is the primary end of the social movement today, it is also not less a means. Men want security of opportunity, so that they may then gain ampler results from the use of their powers than were ever before aimed at by men in great numbers. Say what we will about men's narrow conceptions of life, and their sordid ambitions; popular conception of what it is to be a man are larger and truer than they have ever been throughout great masses before. I do not find men philosophizing very analytically or comprehensively about specifications that should be satisfied in right human life. By putting together what many men are saying, however, I get at traits of large common conceptions which no one person expresses completely. The men who are most sincerely struggling for security want it as the passport to more complete living. They feel, if they do not expressly say, that man's life is not realized when he is a well-greased cog in the industrial machine. He is not a man who is merely a well-fed drudge. Manhood is properly many-sided.

Cultivating man is as proper a pursuit as amassing riches. Therefore let us have security in order that we may become men. There is latent in every man, not merely power to toil, but to toil intelligently. Every man is a possible economist, *i. e.*, an organizer of effort upon rational principles. Every man has it in him to become in some degree a scientist, *i. e.*, one who knows reality. Every man is a potential statesman, *i. e.*, a maker of social life, if not of the highest rank, of some rank. Every man is of necessity at last his own priest. Men today instinctively assert the personal importance that belongs with partial consciousness of their latent powers. They want security in order that as workers and thinkers and citizens and worshipers they may realize their larger selves. The task which society today imposes upon its members is direct and conscious effort so to organize personal relations that the masses of men, with their

manifold endowment, may together realize their common humanity.

The social movement is set in motion by this need, though it does not distinctly understand the impulse. The social movement is thus inevitable, though not yet wholly intelligent. It is respectable, though its manifestations are not yet altogether dignified. It deserves the study of all who love truth. It deserves the sympathy and the wise coöperation of all who love their kind.

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